



FIGURE 12. Cave entrance and creek outflow about 1912. (U.S. Forest Service photo, Siskiyou National Forest.)

## CHAPTER 2

# The Closing of a Frontier, 1885-1915

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The frontier, especially as this concept pertains to the United States, is sometimes defined as a shifting or advancing zone that marks the successive limits of Euro-American settlement. As a cultural construction, this idea resonated with a society that saw its expansion as a political unit in the form of margins in settled or developed territory. Josephine County represented one such margin until 1883 since its access to national and international markets was impeded by the lack of a transportation system capable of profitably carrying heavy loads of agricultural or other commodities over long distances. By better linking western products to a larger market economy, railroads received federal subsidies in the form of land grants to put an end to the farmer's isolation. Their tracks also prompted investors to expand agricultural production in addition to other types of extraction such as minerals, fish, and logs. This fueled population growth, but all of these outcomes were predicated on producers being close enough to the tracks so that additional transport costs (in the form of tolls and freight charges on the relatively few wagon roads suitable for hauling goods in quantity) could be minimized.<sup>1</sup>

Regular stagecoach service that commenced between Sacramento and Portland in July 1860 made a ferry crossing of the Rogue River known as Grants Pass into a station stop. It remained just that until the railroad arrived, whereupon Grants

Pass became a commercial center, but one still in Jackson County. Residents of Josephine County petitioned the state legislature in 1885 to change the boundary in order for Grants Pass and its rail connection to fall within their purview, one that consequently embraced a total of 1.04 million acres (about 1.7 percent of the state; Jackson County was left with 1.78 million acres).<sup>2</sup> Most of Josephine County's population growth during this period occurred in the Grants Pass area, so that few people expressed surprised when it became the county seat in 1886 after a vote where the new city eclipsed its competitors (Kerby and Wilderville) by 116 ballots of the 716 cast.<sup>3</sup> The effect on business generated in the Illinois Valley and from Williams was immediate; instead of their commerce flowing to Jacksonville by stage and wagon as it had since the 1860s, both areas fell further behind communities located in the main Rogue River corridor.<sup>4</sup> Wagon roads connected communities located away from the rail line (one built by the Southern Pacific to connect Oregon with California in 1887, thus finishing a project that had stalled in Roseburg and Redding during the early 1870s), but travel by stage was slow and uncomfortable in comparison to the train, while freight wagons could not approach the capacity of a boxcar. To further illustrate the difficulties associated with being off the main rail corridor, the fastest horse-drawn stages needed 24 hours to go from Grants Pass with Crescent City. Only when automobile stages began their operation in 1914 along this route through the Illinois Valley did the trip take as little as 12 hours.<sup>5</sup>

In the minds of at least two county residents, the portal created by trains stopping at Grants Pass made "the great limestone caves of Josephine County" worthy of developing into a showpiece. As early as 1885, a few people saw the cave's potential to bring tourist dollars from beyond Oregon and thus diversify (if only in a small way) a regional economy still dependent on agriculture and to a lesser extent, mining. These entrepreneurs blazed and opened pack trails to the cave from two directions in the belief that the existing road network could bring visitors in sufficient numbers to recoup a modest investment made in ladders and camping amenities at the cave. They generated some local (and occasionally regional) publicity that made frequent reference to how the Josephine County Caves compared favorably with the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, but this venture failed, as did the one that followed. Only when public subsidies for automobile

**GRANDEST DISCOVERY OF THE AGE**

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**THE GREAT**

# **LIMESTONE CAVES**

**Of Josephine Co.**

**Over three miles of underground passages  
explored, and new discoveries  
made recently.**

Streams, Lakes and Waterfalls of unsurpassed beauty; crystalized and ice-like formations of every conceivable shape of dazzling beauty, and magnificent diamond-paved avenues and crystal palaces. Huge alabaster columns, stalactites and stalagmites, frost-like incrustations, life-like formations, pulpits and thrones of matchless workmanship and magnificence, chambers of huge dimensions, forming altogether

**A SCENE OF GRANDEUR AND BEAUTY**

— NEVER BEFORE DISCOVERED. —

A Beautiful Stream of Clear Ice-cold Water Runs from the Caves, which Possesses

**MEDICINAL QUALITIES**  
**OF A HIGH ORDER.**

Cattle of all kinds and mountain trout in abundance, a good pasture for horses and plenty of feed.  
Here is the place for

**The Tourist, Invalid and Pleasure Seeker**

to find what they want. The scenery along the route can not be surpassed in beauty.

**THESE CAVES ARE TWENTY EIGHT MILES DUE SOUTH FROM GRANTS PASS, OREGON.**

Twenty miles good wagon road, balizee mountain trail. Another route via. Kertyville, somewhat further, but wagon road to within five miles of caves, balizee good mountain trail. One house and plenty of good camping places at the cave. For further particulars address

**H. D. HARKNESS, Leland, Or.**

T. J. CHAMBERLAIN, Printer, 206 Commercial St., Salem, Oregon.

FIGURE 13. Advertisement circulated by Burch and Harkness in 1885.  
(Courtesy of the Mazamas Library.)

roads and associated infrastructure became available could the Oregon Caves attract sufficient private investment to make tourism at such a remote site represent even a small move away from local dependence on extraction as an economic base.



FIGURE 14. W.G. Steel (center, top) with the Harkness Brothers and S.S. Nicolini (center, front) at the cave entrance, August 1888. (Photo by S.D. Dewert, OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)

*Developing a “private” show cave, 1885-1894*

Walter Burch first heard of the cave in 1884 and decided to explore the feasibility of a new transportation route going up Sucker Creek from the Illinois Valley. According to Josephine County historian Larry McLane, Burch found himself in a position to examine the potential of the site as a commercial show cave because he had developed part of the Grants Pass townsite prior to the railroad’s arrival.<sup>6</sup> He and his brother-in-law, Homer Harkness, saw the cave’s potential as lucrative enough to post a notice of location (the precursor to a mining claim) in the spring of 1885 at the entrance Davidson found, having arrived there by way of Horse Mountain.<sup>7</sup> They attempted to gain title to 160 acres that included the cave under the Timber and Stone Act of 1878, but failed to obtain the required survey, so the claim could not go to patent.<sup>8</sup>

While he and Harkness waited for the survey, Burch hired four men to build a trail up Cave Creek. It took almost six weeks for the crew to construct just over four miles of trail that connected the Sucker Creek “road” with the cave. Once at the entrance, Burch’s crew fashioned wooden ladders and then cleared a campground.<sup>9</sup> Work continued the following spring, when Burch and one of the laborers returned to cut a trail from Williams Creek to

the cave by way of "Meadows Mountain" and Lake Creek. Burch went back to his base at Grave Creek, near Leland, and brought another man to the cave entrance, this time to build a cabin covered with shakes. Despite these improvements and the advertisements placed in the weekly Grants Pass newspaper, very few visitors came to the cave in 1886 or the following summer.<sup>10</sup> Upon spending an estimated \$1,500, the two "proprietors" quit their operation at the cave after 1888.

That year, ironically enough, a feature in a Portland literary magazine provided some favorable publicity about what awaited tourists at the cave. The three Harkness brothers guided a party originating from Portland when they arrived on the train in Grants Pass on August 25.<sup>11</sup> From the account left by one member of the party, William G. Steel, they traveled on a "reasonably good" wagon road to Williams and then labored with two packhorses on Burch's trail to the cave. In many respects no more noteworthy than other journeys to the cave at that time, the party intended to proceed to Crater Lake once they returned to Grants Pass, thus it presaged later regional tours.<sup>12</sup> The party also attempted to take the first photographs in the cave, an endeavor that required the assistance of four men to carry a camera and supplies needed for flash (or "instantaneous") photography. Those images failed to produce prints, but the newspaper accounts generated most likely formed the basis for including the cave in the first tourist guidebook for Oregon and Washington, one published in 1891.<sup>13</sup>

In realizing the need for a larger amount of private investment capital than what Burch and Harkness could provide, the next "owners" decided to promote the cave like a lode mine of the period. W.J. "Uncle Jack" Henderson and Frank M. Nickerson of Kerby, in conjunction with "Captain" Alfonso B. Smith of San Diego, located a mineral claim encompassing the cave sometime between 1889 and 1891. They did so in order to take nominal possession through posting a notice of location, but did not bring the claim to patent.<sup>14</sup> The trio hoped to attract investors through newspaper publicity generated in San Francisco, arguably the West's economic capital for 40 years and the logical center for promoting any middling- or large-scale speculative venture. It was presumably through Smith's efforts that a reporter and photographer from the San Francisco *Examiner* newspaper were dispatched first to Grants Pass and then reached the cave by stage and wagon from the Illinois Valley in June 1891. Two articles on the pair's

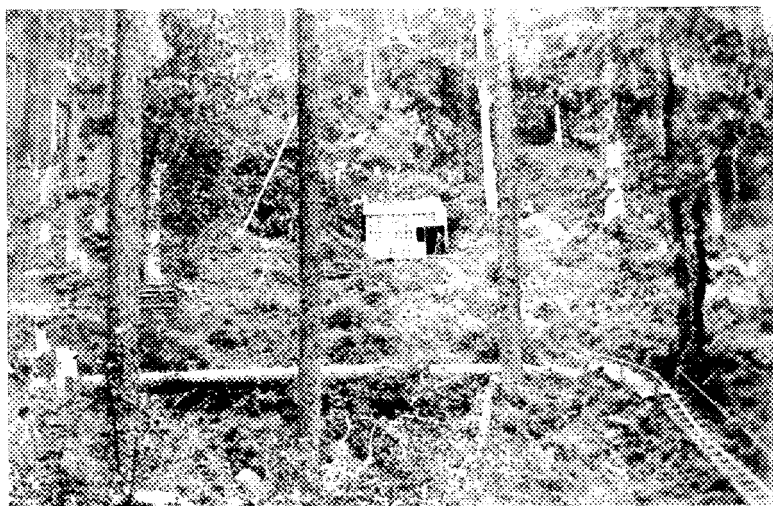


FIGURE 15. The cave entrance during the 1890s. (Photo courtesy of the Josephine County Historical Society).

explorations appeared in consecutive daily issues during the following month, an account that quickly offended some readers in Oregon due to an assertion that the cave constituted a recent discovery.<sup>15</sup>

Aside from misrepresenting the cavern's extent, as well as several other distortions concerning previous exploration that were readily rebutted in the Portland papers, the *Examiner* account is notable for effecting a distinct shift toward a new name for the cave. It had previously been known as the "Great Limestone Caves," or more commonly as the Josephine County Caves, usually in the plural because the stream opening and upper entrance were initially thought to lead to discretely different caverns.<sup>16</sup> In his second *Examiner* article, the writer called on a mineralogist to relate what he called the "Oregon caves" to limestone caverns occurring in California. That name gained some currency as Smith pushed formation of the "Oregon Caves Improvement Company" in San Francisco on February 7, 1894.<sup>17</sup>

Publicity generated by the *Examiner* articles served the improvement scheme, given how a "great many people" were reported by one Grants Pass paper to have visited the cave during the summer of 1893. Smith began an outlandish promotion of the cave by December, claiming that 22 miles of it had been explored, in which 600 chambers could be found. In using the



FIGURE 16. "Breaking a passage," drawing in the *San Francisco Examiner*, 1894.

language of those who preferred to mine investors rather than ore, Smith spoke of a "fairy chamber" set in the strata of California diamonds, while a tornado room was visited by a windstorm every twenty-four hours. An ordinary buggy could be driven ten miles into the cave, though he assured one newspaper that the cave entrance could be widened sufficiently to admit a six-horse stage.<sup>18</sup>

Even if some people knew such statements were hogwash, Smith attracted interest from a United States senator from Oregon who supposedly wanted an appropriation from Congress to allow the Smithsonian Institution to explore the cave—as well as renewed attention in San Francisco.<sup>19</sup> Lying squarely at the center of the nineteenth century western economy, San Francisco represented the key to attracting investors who might be gullible enough to underwrite Smith's intention to connect the cave with Grants Pass by building an electric road (one resembling a street-car line or interurban rail connection) by way of Williams.<sup>20</sup> Smith said he had raised enough money by January 1894 for a road survey and had men working on houses that could serve as temporary lodging near the cave entrance. His immediate aim was to accommodate and publicize another exploring party from the *Examiner*, one set to appear that spring.<sup>21</sup>



Smith's publicity campaign proved convincing enough to attract investors who formed an improvement company in February and reportedly put up \$7,000.<sup>22</sup> Whatever amount they actually pledged seemed enough to fuel construction of several supply stations on the "wagon road" from Williams and two build-ings at the cave entrance.<sup>23</sup> A party led by four men from the *Examiner* finally arrived by train in Grants Pass one evening in May and were greeted by a large crowd. While the *Examiner* group remained at the cave to explore it further, others in the party returned to Grants Pass and proposed that its residents fund the construction of a road to the cave so that the improvement company could focus its resources on accommodating visitors. City officials appointed a committee to study how feasible a public subsidy like the concessions given to railroad promoters in the 1880s might be. The proposal's credibility hinged on what work Smith's crew had completed thus far, as well as publicity generated by the *Examiner* group exploring the cave with its implied benefits for a growing city.<sup>24</sup>

Previous visitors left their mark on the cave by using torches or taking formations as souvenirs, but the *Examiner* party of 1894 made for an orgy of destruction by comparison. Whereas the envoys from the newspaper in 1891 had merely observed that columns (and presumably other types of formations) had filled some of the potentially passable areas and restricted human movement, virtually every one of their more numerous compatriots in 1894 possessed a "smoky torch" and did not hesitate to satiate their curiosity by breaking soda straws or more rotund formations should these be in the way. To them the scratching of arrows for orientation in the labyrinth they dubbed the "Great Oregon Cave" became a necessity, as was the use of hammers to widen passages or remove obstructions.<sup>25</sup> They justified blasting the "low corridors" between the upper entrance and the cave's largest room, the "Ghost Chamber," by not wanting to waste time with slow travel in areas where previous visitors had gone.<sup>26</sup> Their stay at the cave lasted about ten days, so the group (whose numbers varied from five to eleven) had time to look for new passages. This involved hammering in at least one place to permit entry to the "treasure chamber," but the party found complete skeletons of two large bears, at a place where the men could find no opening from the outside.<sup>27</sup>

The final news article printed in the *Examiner* during June of



FIGURE 17. Man holding a torch in the Oregon Caves during the *Examiner* expedition, 1894.

1894 closed with yet another allusion to Kentucky's Mammoth Cave, but also included speculation about how a little dynamite and a good deal of drilling might yield more in the way of subterranean wonder. Its author connected further exploration with the improvement company's plans to light the cave and build a hotel there, naming Smith as superintendent of the work. Those plans unraveled, however, within days of when this article appeared in the *Examiner*. By August 1894 the company publicly disassociated itself from Smith, who had continued to incur debts on its behalf, such that the directors now levied an assessment of sixty cents a share on the stockholders to remain even marginally solvent.<sup>28</sup> Smith disappeared, and the company quickly collapsed.<sup>29</sup>

### *Into a void, 1895-1905*

Despite leaving some local businessmen in the lurch, as well as those to whom Smith owed wages, ventures like the Oregon Caves Improvement Company were a commonly accepted part of the West's volatile economy during this period. Lode mines, the



FIGURE 18. Grants Pass – Crescent City Stagecoach, about 1900. (Photo courtesy of the Josephine County Historical Society.)

building of railroads, and real estate development were fueled by speculation. Their promoters used newspapers and magazines to lend credence to schemes requiring capital from investors large and small, so it is little wonder that those proclaiming the wonder of potential tourist attractions adopted the same conventions.<sup>30</sup>

Those who wrote about the cave's wonders in the aftermath of the improvement company fiasco of 1894 neglected to mention that debacle, of course, since their purpose was promotion. They carried on with platitudes about how Oregon Caves compared with Mammoth Cave, given the latter's stature as the nation's most famous underground attraction. These accounts also pointed to the need for thorough "scientific" exploration of Oregon Caves in addition to advising would-be adventurers on what to expect during their visit.<sup>31</sup> The writing, as might be expected from Victorian hucksters, sometimes drifted into the florid but consistently attempted to arouse interest in the dark and mysterious features of the cave, though in a way probably best described as Gothic romanticism.<sup>32</sup> None of them triggered any further attempts to develop the cave commercially, though the stage which ran between Grants Pass and Crescent City could arrange a side trip there if a group of paying passengers exceeded eight in number.<sup>33</sup>

Now that the cave lacked an "owner," parties wishing to visit would have to arrange for their own guides—as the articles appearing between 1895 and 1907 took care to emphasize. Most of the ladders placed during the two attempts at commercial operation

remained (as did remnants of structures at the cave entrance), but the number of visitors stayed so low without better transportation links that no one bothered to claim the cave. While the prospects for a burgeoning tourist industry with the cave at its forefront seemed dim, if not all together absent, Josephine County did experience some economic diversification during the 1890s. Mining still occupied a place in an economy of a county whose population tripled (to 7,500) between 1880 and 1900, but this activity fell to a distant second behind fruit production of orchards around Grants Pass that exported by rail.<sup>34</sup> Explosive population growth around the San Francisco Bay Area at that time provided an incentive to boost lumber production on the west coast, but the rugged terrain of the Siskiyou Mountains easily defeated attempts to obtain timber inexpensive enough to ship from Josephine County. The county's timber industry remained a local affair, one that could not expand without technological advances that might overcome topographic barriers and distance—especially if the forests of the public domain were to ever play a part in economic diversification.

As part of the public domain, the cave and its surrounding forest land were a "frontier commons" during this period, in the sense they lacked permanent settlement and were thus open to any number of uses. Aside from the relatively few mining claims, an individual could hunt, fish, gather food, use forage, or cut timber without the need to recognize formal ownership boundaries and other types of controls needed to prevent conflicts among users. In short, the "frontier commons" could persist where competition for resources was slight. A shift, however, began during the 1890s in the federal government's role to a more active agent whose willingness to regulate (rather than dispose of) the public domain it still controlled. The most widespread change came in the form of reserving forests, to be accompanied by permits for grazing and prohibitions on activities such as setting fires to improve forage. Impetus for imposing what initially were called "forest reserves" on what the government retained as public domain came from far beyond the Siskiyou, mainly through recognition that eastern forests had been reduced rapidly through land clearance and logging. Ownership of forested land in the United States increased after 1850, for example, to the point where four-fifths of all standing timber had fallen into private hands by 1886—more than doubling the figure alienated from the public domain just 30 years before.<sup>35</sup>



FIGURE 19. This view of visitors in the cave shows the type of ladders and torches in use during the early 1900s. (Photo by Robert Grimmert, courtesy of the Josephine County Historical Society.)

Statutory loopholes and abuses in selling public land led to concentrated private ownership of forests in the east, as well as fraudulent acquisition of timber by syndicates in the western states. Fears of denuded watersheds and a host of uncontrollable impacts following from such an ownership pattern in the 1890s prodded Congress to pass legislation that allowed the President to proclaim forest reserves in unallocated public land containing timber. As a sort of safety valve that might ensure more far-sighted use of natural resources, the forest reserves also sprang from the realization by some that much of the mountainous west remained unsuitable for settlement but might provide an all-important water supply and a resource base that could be managed in perpetuity. Although there were objections to the advent of forest reserves in Oregon,

others saw potential investment for community development and praised the idea of allowing permanent public access to the reserves.<sup>36</sup>

Speculators remained a fly in the ointment because they often moved ahead of proclamations and bought up vacant school sections (each township in the public domain contained one where the proceeds from sale went to support local schools) which had to be compensated through exchange of public lands located elsewhere; they were often allowed to choose much more valuable timber according to a "lieu land" provision in the existing law. This loophole allowed those sufficiently capitalized to control vast acreages, especially when the "land rings" hired "settlers" to claim tracts as a homestead under the loosely written Timber and Stone Act of 1878 and then used these for "base" to trade for more valuable sections after the forest reserve was proclaimed. Agents in the General Land Office (who, in conjunction with the U.S. Geological Survey, studied public lands as possible forest reserves during the 1890s) recommended that such abuse could be lessened if the President made temporary withdrawals of forested land. This would effectively suspend mining claims or other types of "entry" by private parties until lands still in the public domain could be studied for their suitability within the authorized boundaries of a permanent forest reserve.

### *The advent of federal land management, 1906-1915*

It took five years for a withdrawal that embraced the public domain around Oregon Caves to take place. As a precursor to a permanent forest reserve, more than a million acres of land situated in Josephine, Curry, Douglas, and Coos counties was studied in 1898. Rancor over the prospect of such a reserve worked to delay even a temporary withdrawal, but it had little to do with effects on the timber industry as it then existed. As mining faded in the Illinois Valley during the 1880s, so did milling activity, subsiding to just one operation on Sucker Creek that produced about a thousand board feet of lumber per day.<sup>37</sup> Small mills existed for local needs elsewhere in Josephine County at that time, but commercial lumber production (that shipped out of southwestern Oregon) existed only in Grants Pass. The city was large enough to provide a ready labor force for several mills, with some specializing in the processing of sugar pine. For the most part, however,

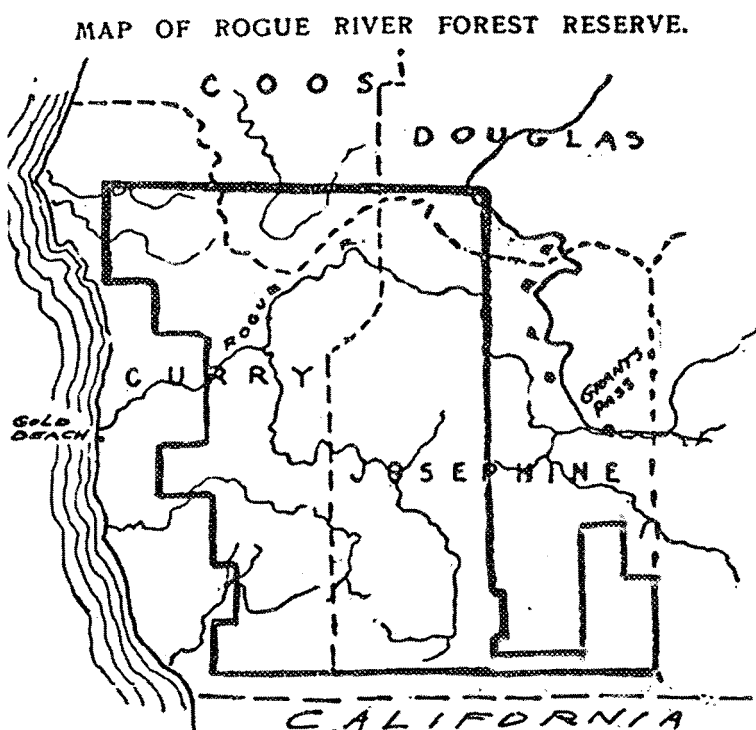


FIGURE 20. The Rogue River withdrawal, as proposed in May 1903.

Josephine County remained unattractive to large-scale milling operations due to the general lack of rail access to timbered stands and a general feeling that it possessed only "light growth" of inferior quality.<sup>38</sup>

What held up the "Rogue River withdrawal" (so named because the prospective forest reserve centered on the river's lower basin) were questions over the disposition of alternate sections in the defaulted Oregon and California Railroad grant. GLO commissioner Binger Hermann also cited some patented homesteads and mining claims being within the proposed reserve as further justification for reporting adversely on a withdrawal in 1902.<sup>39</sup> Hermann's dismissal from his post by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 created enough of a void for an opposite view to prevail. H.D. "Doug" Langille, a forest inspector with GLO, made a case for withdrawing some 1.2 million acres in southwest Oregon. His recommendation was endorsed by the Secretary of the Interior and then ordered by Roosevelt on April 29, 1903.<sup>40</sup>

Withdrawal constituted only a first step toward establishing a

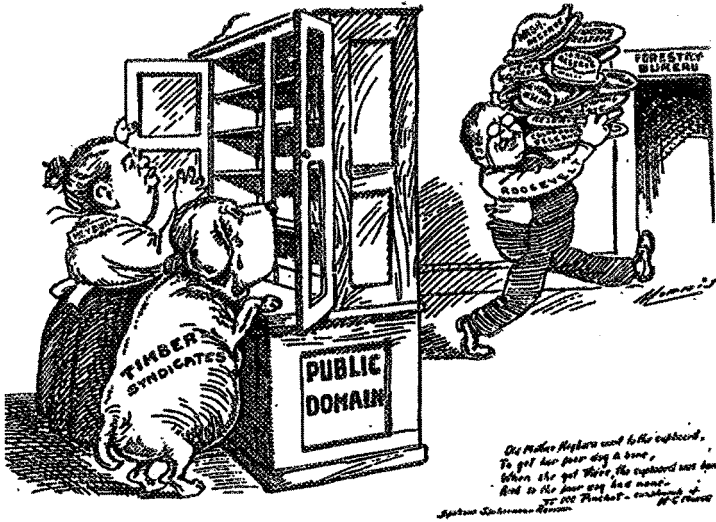


FIGURE 21. Many newspapers of the time hailed Theodore Roosevelt as the champion of federal forestry. This cartoon appeared in the *Spokane Review* of 1908.

permanent reserve, though it was intended to be only a temporary measure to permit closer examination of the affected lands. The order halted the land rings for the time being, in that they excluded all forms of entry, but its opponents frequently made the charge that valuable agricultural land had been withdrawn. Others thought that prospecting for minerals should continue on the withdrawn lands, but that the largely mountainous topography precluded any hope of commercial agriculture. One forestry official in 1903 responded by characterizing the opposition as dominated by those who objected to losing their illegal access to free forage and timber.<sup>41</sup>

Proclamation of the Siskiyou Forest Reserve from the Rogue River Withdrawal stalled in the face of complications posed by the inclusion of O&C lands (a minor problem solved by eliminating those sections already granted to a railroad syndicate) and opposition to the reserve in Curry County, where the reserve would have amounted to three-fifths of the land area. This resulted in elimination of roughly 500,000 acres from the proposed reserve in 1906, though 446,000 acres were added to it from other townships by the date of official proclamation on March 2, 1907.<sup>42</sup> Roosevelt acted just two days before he lost the authority to make such proclamations in Oregon and five other western states. The



restriction came from legislation backed by opponents of the forest reserves in Congress (one being Senator Charles Fulton of Oregon), though the President's action in creating a number of "midnight reserves" largely rendered such resistance futile.<sup>43</sup>

Even if Roosevelt lost his authority to proclaim forest reserves in some of the west, he retained the power to designate "national monuments" on public land located anywhere in the nation. The so-called "Antiquities Act" passed by Congress on June 8, 1906, stipulated that the boundaries of such monuments should be confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected. This provision of the act may have been based on the specific aim of preserving prehistoric Indian ruins in the southwestern states, though the law was applied to encompass a broader range of antiquities from the time of its enactment.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Oregon Caves, its proclamation followed a somewhat similar sequence to that of the surrounding forest reserve, or "Siskiyou National Forest" as it was known from March 4, 1907.

What seems to have triggered the initial withdrawal of the area surrounding Oregon Caves as a future national monument can be tied to the arrival of poet and writer Joaquin Miller in Grants Pass on August 3, 1907. One paper gave readers two days notice before his arrival, stating that the flamboyant Miller intended to meet Ashland attorney Chandler B. Watson (who had once dabbled in railroads, real estate, and timber lands) at the station and then go to the cave.<sup>45</sup> The pair hoped to duplicate for Oregon Caves what Miller and others did for Crater Lake several years earlier. In 1903 the poet helped arouse interest in Crater Lake by joining a heavily publicized "camping trip" organized by Will G. Steel (Watson's one-time business associate) that departed from Medford and included Senator Fulton among its members. Miller's article in *Sunset* magazine (an organ of the Southern Pacific Railroad published in California and aimed at promoting tourism in the west) titled "The Sea of Silence" helped to increase the popularity of newly established Crater Lake National Park.<sup>46</sup>

Miller's arrival in Grants Pass coincided with a telegram to the chief of the United States Forest Service (a bureau in the Department of Agriculture created by Congress in 1905 for managing the forest reserves) requesting an immediate withdrawal of four sections (2,560 acres) around the cave. Forest Supervisor M.J. Anderson wanted to prevent one R.W. Veach from filing a

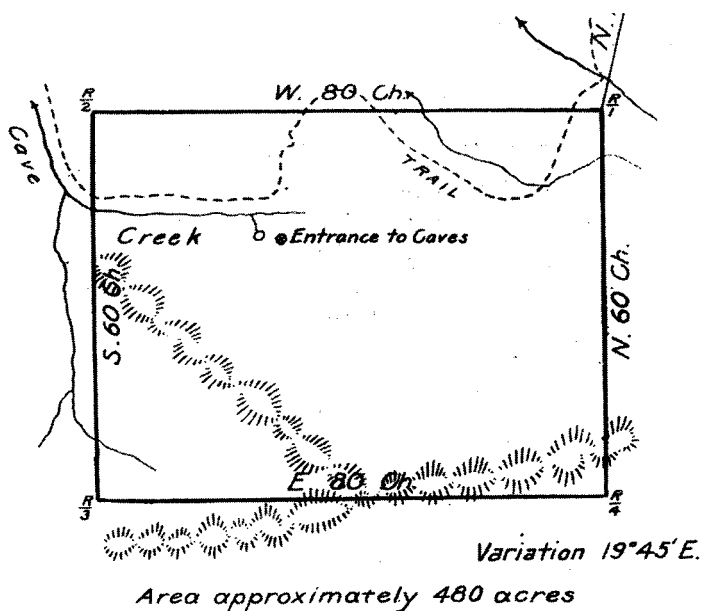


FIGURE 22. Robert Dean's survey sketch for the proposed Oregon Caves National Monument, early 1909.

mining claim in that area as a pretext for controlling the cave.<sup>47</sup> Officials in Washington, D.C. expedited the withdrawal, effective as of August 12.<sup>48</sup> Apparently outmaneuvered, or at least prevented from pursuing a mineral entry, Veach and his associate G.O. Oium applied for a permit to furnish guides, light the cave, and build a hotel at the cave in exchange for full control of some 62 acres inside the withdrawn parcel. The Forest Service took no action on this request, presumably because Anderson had yet to report on the withdrawal or follow through with a survey aimed at determining exact boundaries for a national monument to be created around the cave.<sup>49</sup>

Such tasks were not a top priority for Anderson and his tiny staff of forest guards. They spent most of their time that season trying to ascertain forest boundaries and determining whether claims made under the land laws were fraudulent or not.<sup>50</sup> By November a survey crew had come near enough to the cave in locating a trail, but other work and winter storms delayed any survey for a future national monument until the following year, but even this fairly routine endeavor had to be spurred by Oium making another request for a ten year lease at the cave.<sup>51</sup> Anderson

then sent a forest guard, Robert Dean, to survey and report on a proposed national monument. Dean did little more than run corners for an administrative site (the printed form he used for the report had "administrative site" struck in favor of "national monument") thus creating a neat rectangle of about 480 acres, more or less.<sup>52</sup> He contended in the report that "within this tract is situated the Oregon Caves," but Dean offered no evidence that the cave fell within the corners he established. In making only a rough sketch that accompanied the notes pertaining to the running of these lines, Dean located the cave entrance below adjacent ridge-lines indicated by some hachures.<sup>53</sup>

Anderson meanwhile tried to make a case for granting Veach and Oium the permit they sought. He wrote to the chief forester that visitors had destroyed formations, even after the Forest Service had posted notices threatening closure of the cave until the necessary means for its protection could be provided.<sup>54</sup> Oddly enough, reference to vandalism had almost vanished from news articles or other published accounts about Oregon Caves during the decade preceding 1906. Miller and his companions nevertheless identified the need to protect the cave from vandals during their visit in August 1907.<sup>55</sup> The argument for national monument status only seemed to gain momentum when Anderson submitted papers containing his report (and presumably Dean's survey) to the district forester's office in February 1909. He explained that visitors had "blown off and carried away" many of the most valuable formations, thus prompting him to recommend that a national monument be proclaimed by the President. Anderson also wrote that the Forest Service rebuilt and improved trails leading to Oregon Caves, not only for better access, but also to more easily protect the valuable forest surrounding them.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the expediency of withdrawing four sections around the cave in 1907 and then reducing the area encompassed by the proposed monument with a crude survey, potential timber values can help explain why the future Oregon Caves National Monument was destined to remain small.<sup>57</sup> As Anderson explained to the district (later regional) forester in Portland, the withdrawal constituted a temporary measure until a survey of the cave's "exact" location could be made.<sup>58</sup> He and other agency officials knew that at least one previous inventory showed that timber volumes in the vicinity to be among the highest in southwestern Oregon.<sup>59</sup> It made sense (at least to the foresters who saw better

access to timber in the Siskiyou Mountains on the far horizon) to strictly comply with provisions of the Antiquities Act restricting any national monument encompassing Oregon Caves to the smallest area compatible with proper care and management of the protected objects.<sup>60</sup>

The need for protected status gave the matter of Oregon Caves some urgency, so a proclamation was drafted at the district forester's office in February 1909 and then sent to Washington, D.C. on March 1.<sup>61</sup> It should be stressed that only the President possessed the power to make such a proclamation, but Gifford Pinchot as chief forester seemed eager to allay any charges that a future Oregon Caves National Monument represented a case of administrative fiat—even if it was. As a master politician, Pinchot engineered creation of the Forest Service by working through his friend Theodore Roosevelt and other influential men both in and out of government. Pinchot knew that public acceptance of any regulatory measure often hinged on the Forest Service being seen as reactive to a crisis, even one like Oregon Caves, where prominent citizens or an organization raised an alarm through the media.

As creatures of the Progressive Movement which dominated American politics through the 1920s, he and the Forest Service conducted a clever public relations campaign that preached a "gospel" of efficiency where public lands such as forests held a multitude of "resources" like timber and forage. These were not to be wasted, especially for speculative ventures, but used under the purview of scientifically trained foresters who could arbitrate when conflicting interests had to be reconciled for "the greatest good for the greatest number [of American citizens] in the long run."<sup>62</sup> This kind of forestry, even if only custodial at the time, could promise everything to virtually everyone, despite rarely generating enough revenue to meet its administrative expenses through receipts from mining leases, timber sales, or grazing allotments. Despite its failure to achieve self-sufficiency, Forest Service control brought an end of frontier conditions, at least in part of the public domain. Pinchot and the Forest Service, however, co-opted the language of the frontier to obtain appropriations from Congress aimed at preventing wildfires that, along with unscrupulous forest users, could denude watersheds and needlessly destroy resources that could meet current and future needs.<sup>63</sup>

Buoyed by the success that Roosevelt had in destroying the

opposition to his forest policy at the conference on public lands in Denver in June 1907, Pinchot encouraged the western states to establish what came to be called "conservation commissions." Governor George Chamberlain appointed members for the quasi-public Oregon Conservation Commission in 1908, a body with a nonexistent budget that lobbied for orderly and efficient development of the state. It crafted natural resource policy through formal recommendations, focusing on the potential of water for power, irrigation, and forestry in Oregon.<sup>64</sup> Watson happened to be a member of the commission and seems to have induced the chairman, J.N. Teal of Portland, to write Pinchot in June of 1909 about the destruction caused by vandals and how torches used by visitors defaced the cave.<sup>65</sup> One of Pinchot's assistants replied to Teal on July 6, writing that a proclamation had already been sent to the President (Roosevelt's successor, William H. Taft), who was expected to sign it.<sup>66</sup>

Anderson had already assured the district forester and Pinchot of local support for the proclamation in June by sending a booklet from the Grants Pass Commercial Club, predecessor to the town's chamber of commerce, promoted public ownership of the cave and contained numerous photographs.<sup>67</sup> He and the district forester (as well as Pinchot, presumably) already knew of Miller's article on the cave to be published by *Sunset* in September.<sup>68</sup> The piece reached a wide regional audience, just as his earlier article on Crater Lake had, so no one could accuse the Forest Service of being disingenuous or duplicitous in acting to protect the Oregon Caves.<sup>69</sup>

What made the proclamation as signed by Taft rather curious was its creation of overlapping reservations. The national monument established on 480 acres of the 1907 withdrawal was to be dominant over the surrounding national forest, another reservation created by presidential proclamation.<sup>70</sup> This seems to have been an attempt to make preservation of the cave compatible with expected future use of the Siskiyou National Forest, hence the language in the national monument proclamation forbidding use of the land that interfered with its status as a protected area. The proclamation also included a boilerplate warning about destroying or removing the monument's natural features, as well as a prohibition on settlement. These provisions bore enough resemblance to those in other monument proclamations issued between 1906 and 1911 that one historian has concluded that all such documents, at

least in their original form, came from the hand of one employee in the Department of the Interior.<sup>71</sup> In any event, the proclamation establishing Oregon Caves National Monument on July 12, 1909, generated little publicity in the state's newspapers, though the accidental shooting death in the cave of Frank Ellis, a Grants Pass resident, several weeks later certainly did.<sup>72</sup>

Ellis and his companions, like some others among the estimated 360 visitors that summer, had come to the cave without hiring a guide.<sup>73</sup> The Forest Service did not yet provide such service, or for that matter, have a presence at the monument—even if the district forester's office in Portland, upon advising Anderson of the signed proclamation, had asked him to "assume charge at once."<sup>74</sup> That year the Siskiyou National Forest had been divided into districts, though the nearest ranger (who spent much of his time on fire patrol) established his headquarters more than 20 miles away by trail and wagon road, on Page Creek, located near the settlement of Takilma.<sup>75</sup>

Although Forest Service officials expressed token concern about public safety at Oregon Caves in the wake of the Ellis shooting, what finally put a man on site (at least in the summer months) was vandalism. Earlier deliberations about granting a lease in exchange for private parties making improvements became moot, mainly because outlay needed to build a lighting plant or hotel accommodations in such a remote area seemed simply too great. Approximately 300 visitors came to the new national monument in 1910, an insufficient number for recouping an investment in facilities even if a fee was charged for entering the cave, with the levy being on top of what most had already paid their guide for pack-horses and camping gear. Anderson and others in the Forest Service meanwhile voiced their concern about damage to formations, especially the discoloration resulting from the use of pitch torches by visitors and their guides. Although granting a lease to private parties who might provide facilities and protect the cave remained a financial impossibility, the idea of employing a guard there to deter those who might violate posted rules began to gain momentum. The Forest Service had to be prodded, however, by a letter from the Oregon Conservation Commission in order to hire its first guard at Oregon Caves, one to be employed for the summer season of 1911.<sup>76</sup>

At a time when the agency began to impose grazing fees and sell timber for building mining shafts, Forest Service officials made

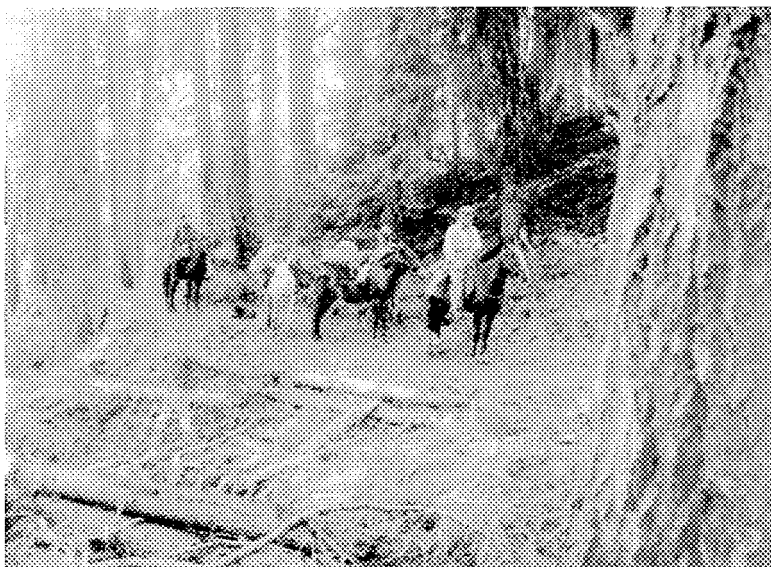


FIGURE 23. Pack train on the trail from Williams to Oregon Caves, about 1915. (U.S. Forest Service photo, Siskiyou National Forest.)

a point to downplay the free guide service provided by the guard.<sup>77</sup> They hired Vickers G. Smith for 60 dollars a month that season and instructed him that tours could be given only once a day, since protection work (which in their view justified the position) came first. His duties thus included installing new ladders inside the cave, realigning the trail to Williams near the monument, and posting numerous warnings as a way to better ensure compliance with provisions in the Antiquities Act. Given how staffing on the Siskiyou was limited to a few guards and even fewer rangers, the new forest supervisor R.L. Fromme nevertheless complained to the district office that Smith could not be made available for fire patrol duty over a wider area.<sup>78</sup>

Small as the appropriations were at the time, federal funding for improving facilities at Oregon Caves and Smith's salary represented a shift from the nineteenth century conception of the frontier commons as *laissez-faire*. So did fire patrol and other management activities on the forest, since they were manifested as tax-supported regulation in the name of expected future returns from conserving natural resources. Federal foresters of the time consistently made a case for maintaining a "bank" of standing timber free from the threat of fire in the expectation that it would eventually become an accessible commodity. Managed properly, national

forests might thus help the nation avert a disastrous "wood famine" stemming from wasteful logging and a lack of foresight by those who owned private land.<sup>79</sup>

In the early part of the twentieth century, putting up public funds in the hope of beneficial future returns (albeit in the shorter term) resonated to many people at the local level. Businessmen and other boosters in Grants Pass, for example, understood the value of its rail connection to Portland and Sacramento, but knew that more lines into southwest Oregon's hinterland could open the way for additional prosperity and attract more people to Josephine County. In 1911 Grants Pass boasted slightly over 6,000 inhabitants (in a county whose number of residents totaled about 9,500), and responded enthusiastically to plans announced by a syndicate of "capitalists" from San Francisco and Portland who wanted to build a new railroad line. This one was to run from Grants Pass to the cave by way of the Applegate drainage so that the Williams area might be better developed.<sup>80</sup> City residents raised \$60,000 from subscriptions in order for construction to begin in March 1911, but the holding company went bankrupt after building a line for several months along a surveyed route from Grants Pass through the Illinois Valley and toward Crescent City.<sup>81</sup> Construction of the "California and Oregon Coast Railroad" commenced again in 1913 with a \$200,000 municipal bond from Grants Pass, though this infusion of public money provided only enough capital for the line to terminate only fifteen miles southwest of town.<sup>82</sup>

Plans for a road from the Illinois Valley to the monument during that period followed a similar trajectory. In early 1912, Grants Pass promoters supposedly induced Portland "parties" to put up \$25,000 for a road starting from the hamlet of Holland, with its start contingent upon securing a permit from the Forest Service that allowed them to build a hotel and light the cave. Although he had since resigned from the Forest Service, Anderson's involvement with the scheme provided it with some credibility. Anderson applied to Fromme for the permit, writing that funds secured for a wagon road from Holland to the cave would allow for construction to continue all the way to Williams, so that visitors might pass the cave on their way to or from Crescent City. The Forest Service stalled on granting the permit, citing a competing application for similar privileges and the question of whether exclusive control (which would follow from lighting the cave, since it tied



directly to a guide service) could be given to private parties on a national monument.<sup>83</sup> Representatives from all three departments administering national monuments (Agriculture, Interior, and War) met to discuss this question in June 1911 and subsequently reached the conclusion that the government should not allow private parties to develop or manage the monuments, even under departmental restrictions. This decision allowed Fromme to deny Anderson's request for a permit, at least in its existing form.<sup>84</sup>

Undeterred, Anderson circulated a petition asking Congress to establish a national park on the land surrounding Oregon Caves so that private capital could develop a lighting system and build a hotel as part of a lease arrangement.<sup>85</sup> He and supporters in the Grants Pass Commercial Club attempted to gain the backing of Oregon's congressional delegation during a period when two other national park proposals in the state seemed to be gathering momentum.<sup>86</sup> Members of the delegation then introduced bills to establish an Oregon Caves National Park both in the House and Senate during the first week of January 1913.<sup>87</sup> The legislative process directed that these bills were to be reported by the bureau administering the land if already federal, so this task fell to the Forest Service. The new forest supervisor on the Siskiyou, Nelson MacDuff, objected to the Senate version of the bill, which called for transferring an entire township (some 23,000 acres) surrounding Oregon Caves to the Department of the Interior, where its head (the Secretary) had charge of all national parks. His reasons centered on removing merchantable timber from the possibility of future sale, the prohibition on grazing, as well as some doubts about the cave as a scenic attraction.<sup>88</sup> The House bill called for reserving only two and a half sections (1,600 acres) around the cave, so MacDuff did not voice objections based on losing future revenue from timber or grazing. He instead saw advantages to a prospective national park, since a road built to it might permit the transport of logs from the national forest sometime in the future.<sup>89</sup>

Both bills remained mired in committee, buried amid the spate of national park proposals made by western congressmen and senators of the period. Boosters in Grants Pass tried to fuel interest in establishing the park by distributing a booklet of photographs of Oregon Caves, but only succeeded in providing logistical support for the largest gathering at the cave that had been held up to that time.<sup>90</sup> About ninety members of the Mazamas visited from Portland in June 1913 and generated enough publicity for



FIGURE 24. Wagon road between Kerby and Selma, about 1910. (Photo courtesy of the Josephine County Historical Society.)

residents of Josephine County to stage a “Cave Day,” an event which attracted two hundred people in June of the following year.<sup>91</sup> As the months passed, however, it became increasingly evident that the proposed national park was dead. Pinchot’s successor as chief of the Forest Service, Henry S. Graves, hoped to obtain authority from Congress that might allow the agency to grant permits for hotels and summer homes in the national forests—something that amounted to leasing. Such authority might make it expeditious to rescind the proclamation for Oregon Caves (since the Forest Service continued to assume that it lacked the means to entice private parties to develop facilities for the national monuments), a prospect that quickly garnered support from the Grants Pass Commercial Club.<sup>92</sup>

Left with few other options in the mean time, boosters continued to promote the need for a road to Oregon Caves<sup>93</sup>. Not only did they see the cave as an enticing focal point bound to attract thousands of visitors, but a road to it might augment resource extraction over a wider area. In early 1914, for example, one journalist extolled the superb hunting and fishing opportunities near the monument and then speculated how "investigation" of the "gigantic copper belt" lying between Oregon Caves and the coast would come once the means for tourist travel had been developed.<sup>94</sup>

Although the means seemed to lie in building roads, how to finance such construction in sparsely populated areas remained problematic. In 1910 the Oregon Conservation Commission pointed to how inadequate the prevailing method of using county property taxes for constructing and maintaining roads of any standard. The system was especially unfair where considerable road mileage was needed to serve relatively few residents whose property had low assessed value. Commission members concluded that only the state could finance the amount needed for an adequate road system in Oregon, something that might hopefully be achieved with federal aid.<sup>95</sup>

Despite being a tenet of the "Good Roads Movement" that attracted a broad base of support throughout the United States, state financing of roads in Oregon had so far proven to be elusive. Some local groups who saw economic development as following from the stimulation of tourist travel to scenic attractions located on federal land tried to obtain appropriations for individual road projects from Congress, but met with only limited success.<sup>96</sup> Will Steel was named superintendent at Crater Lake National Park in 1913 largely because he had previously led the effort that resulted in garnering federal money for a system of roads and trails in the park.<sup>97</sup> His efforts culminated in one of the few success stories that resulted from approaching Congress this way, though Steel and other Crater Lake supporters were openly critical of the state's reticence to undertake construction of an approach road from Medford several years earlier. The question of how to finance roads had become hot as early as 1910, when the Oregon Supreme Court ruled the prospective Medford route to Crater Lake constituted "a local affair" (and thus not eligible for funding from Salem), so that the decision raised a furor in the state's newspapers.<sup>98</sup>

Road conditions in Oregon at the time have been described as "primitive" in that only ten percent of the 37,000 miles of road in the state possessed any form of hard surfacing or "base." Oregon contained some 12,000 private automobiles, but the predominance of bad roads confined such travel, especially if it took place outside of cities or beyond the summer months.<sup>99</sup> Promoters of the Columbia River Highway who resided in Portland convinced the Oregon Legislature to take a cautious first step in 1913 toward rectifying the situation by creating a state highway commission. Oregon lagged behind California and Washington in getting even that far, and the body (which in its infancy was largely advisory) did little more than try to drum up local support for counties to issue bonds that could be used to implement plans for a system of trunk roads.<sup>100</sup> None of the cross-state routes ran near Oregon Caves, but Grants Pass paved its Sixth Street in 1910 and this part of the town subsequently became part of the main north-south road in Oregon, the Pacific Highway. In the first years of building this road (which eventually achieved the distinction of being the first to run the entire length of any state west of the Mississippi River), the Pacific Highway nevertheless remained a quagmire between towns, full of torturous curves and other challenges for under-powered automobiles.<sup>101</sup>

Even if horse-drawn grading equipment and gangs of men could slowly improve the Pacific Highway and other trunk routes in Oregon, promoters of a road to the cave faced the stark reality of sparsely populated Josephine County, where elected officials could not fathom issuing bonds for such a project. Illinois Valley residents petitioned to the county in 1914 for \$1,000 to push a road further up Sucker Creek, a project touted to shrink the distance to Oregon Caves from 9.5 miles to 4.6 miles.<sup>102</sup> According to the petitioners, farmers and miners intended to spend a like amount, but the proposal went nowhere for two reasons. With revenues derived from a relatively low tax rate and demands for better roads in more populated parts of the county, officials in Grants Pass balked, especially since the projected route would not reach the cave. For that to happen, there had to be some way to finance roads in the national forests. Chief Forester Graves visited Portland in the fall of 1914 to promote his plan to finance such roads with future revenues from resource development instead of using a portion of current receipts. The allure of Oregon's scenery could be used as justification for the proposal (given how



FIGURE 25. Commercial camp at the confluence of Grayback and Sucker creeks, about 1915. (U.S. Forest Service photo, Siskiyou National Forest.)

the state was thought to be so attractive to prospective tourists that such roads could pay immediate dividends), since it aided the development of local communities who were also supposed to benefit from timber revenue once these stands of merchantable trees could be accessed.<sup>103</sup>

At the time, however, fewer than 3,000 miles of road existed in all of the national forests combined. Without federal legislation authorizing the type of finance Graves and others in the Forest Service had in mind, little could be done for better access to Oregon Caves—aside from some improvements to the trails which started where the wagon roads ended. Visitation to the monument in 1915 stood somewhere around 1,000, enough traffic so that a commercial tent camp began a second season of operations where Grayback and Sucker creeks met to become one stream above the Illinois Valley.<sup>104</sup> This type of enterprise should not, as congressman W.C. Hawley assured his constituents in Grants Pass, constitute an impediment on road construction to Oregon Caves. He had since adopted the hopeful tone of boosters throughout the state, stating that a special appropriation from Congress for a road to the monument could be secured, though his proposal to secure the funds had not yet assumed a tangible form.<sup>105</sup>



FIGURE 26. Family group at the cave entrance, 1914. (Photo by George Barton, OCNM Museum and Archives Collections.)



FIGURE 27. At Government Camp near the cave entrance about 1915. (Photo courtesy of the Josephine County Historical Society.)